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*SOME ASPECTS OF NEW TESTAMENT MIRACLES*¹

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Christianity is a religion of the spirit,—a religion of faith, as the Apostle Paul would have said. That is, its essential nature resides in unseen and spiritual attributes; on the persistence of spiritual forces depends its identity from age to age; the inner attitude of the soul is the sphere of its true life. Neither letter nor form, but spirit, is the characteristic mark of Christianity. If this is true, it follows that the life of Christianity necessarily implies the continually new expression of the Christian spirit amid the ever-changing phases of human thought and life. And historical conditions will govern not only the outward forms and modes of Christian life, but also, at least in its concrete formulation, the thought of Christians about religion. The changes that have taken place in Christian thought and doctrine may well be no indication of any weakness or imperfection in Christianity. They are, in fact, rather the manifestation of its excellence, the proof that it is indeed the supreme religion, capable of bringing in the kingdom of God.

Some have tried, by a process of successive eliminations, to discard the Jewish, the Greek, the pagan, the Teutonic influences which from time to time have affected Christianity, as if by such expurgations they could isolate essential Christianity from its accidents, and separate the kernel from the husk. But if Christianity is a religion of the spirit expressing itself under historical conditions, its expression in any period of history will be made through the ideas, true and false, through the modes of life, crude or refined, through the existing beliefs, philosophies, laws, customs, and even superstitions of the time. Many philosophies which we deem false, many rites which we find degrading, have been the well-justified means of expressing the religion of the

¹A lecture given in the Lowell Institute course at King's Chapel, Boston, November 29, 1909.

spirit for men who held those philosophies and to whom those rites were dear. Those things are to be called foreign influences upon a pure Christianity only in the same sense in which that would be true of the inadequate science, clumsy philosophy, and sorry philistinism of custom which in our own day do duty, as the best we have, for civilization.

If it be asked, wherein, then, lies the assurance that our Christianity is properly called Christian, what force binds together these shifting phases of life and thought, and entitles us to speak of them as belonging to one religion, a personal conviction is the only answer that can be given,—namely, that the identity of the Christian religion through the ages depends on the New Testament, and in particular on the presentation of Jesus Christ found in the gospels and on the persistent spiritual power of his person.

From the general point of view thus outlined the question of the miracles of the New Testament, like every other historical topic connected with the Christian religion, must be considered.

I

The fundamental requisite for modern educated Christians with regard to the accounts of miracles in the New Testament is integrity of thought. It is far less important that one's knowledge should be scientifically exact, or his principles in accord with those prevalent at the present day, than it is that all one's thinking should be in substantial agreement with the real, underlying principles by which he lives. Every one has such principles,—precisely the deepest and most constantly influential of them are often not explicitly formulated in consciousness. They are the profound massive convictions which control motives and judgments, form a man's real character, and in the long run determine his actions. They are the prejudices, if that name is insisted on, which no reasoning, however plausible or cogent, ever fully overcomes, which rise up to disconcert us when we violate them, which now give us solid peace, or again stir recurrent and unappeasable doubts. To shake these deep principles may be necessary, but it is always dangerous. But the man of power and freedom is the

man whose fundamental convictions are sound, and who stands sturdy in the full consistency of his mind.

If a man's fundamental principles leave him in the happy exercise of belief in the miracles of the New Testament, as has been true of many of the best who have ever lived, there is for him no problem in the matter, and no great occasion for clarifying his thought. To the man, however, who feels a constant uneasy prick of tormenting doubt, as is the case with great numbers of educated Christians at the present day, there are several things to be said.

First, he must not shut his eyes to such doubt, and deliberately drown it in an insincere forgetfulness. Peace is too dearly bought at the price of such a moral and intellectual narcotic. A subtle weakening of mind and conscience is the natural result of this, as of other opiates.

Secondly, he must not force his own judgment by special pleading. A man has a full right to say that he does not know; he has no right—though too many good people have done so—to crowd down intellectual doubts by the exercise of will-power. There is a place for the exercise of the will against doubt, but it is where doubt touches a moral choice, not an intellectual judgment. We will refuse to doubt the moral imperative, or the goodness of God, but we are bound to doubt when it is a case of mere weight of evidence, and the balance inclines to the negative side.

Thirdly, the grave religious aspects of the situation are to be frankly admitted. Confidence in the general trustworthiness of the gospels as historical records is undoubtedly important for Christian faith. It may not be easy to say just how much in the way of historical conclusions is requisite in order to provide the necessary basis for the faith of intelligent and reasonable Christians; but for most of us it clearly is important to be convinced that Jesus Christ lived, and that a trustworthy notion can be reached of his character and teaching, his conception of God, his idea of man's relation to God, his utterances about God's requirements of man. To be deprived of this confidence and driven to the belief that the gospels are mere fairy-tales, or even that we can have no knowledge at all about these matters, would for most of us not only destroy the possibility of any clear understanding

of Christian history, but would be likely to require such a reconstruction of our general religious thinking as greatly to impair the vitality and integrity of our religious life. But if all the gospel narratives of miracles—or even many of them—are held to be legendary, can we believe in the rest of the gospels? If we disbelieve the stories of miracles, do the report of the Sermon on the Mount and the incident of the rich young man rest on any better evidence than they? This question is a serious one. Doubtless, precisely this result has sometimes come about, and the fear of it is probably the strongest motive and chief concern with those who at the present day resolutely defend every part of the gospels as proved history.

II

The conception of God, and of God's relation to the world, on which the New Testament ideas about miracles rest is not difficult to see. God is the source of all activity. He created the world at the beginning; he maintains it; from him proceeds the orderly working of the heavenly bodies and the seasons; he gives life and sustains existence. To him the ravens cry for food, from him men receive what the bountiful earth provides. And in all this—in the support and administration of the created world—God is immediately present and active.

If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them, then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. . . . And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. . . .

But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments, . . . I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, . . . and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies; they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you.

It is often hard to know just where the line between literal belief and the poetical representation of dependence on God is to be drawn; and the lofty language of the Psalms about God who

sendeth the springs into the valleys, and watereth the earth with rain, and maketh darkness and it is night, can be used by modern as well as ancient worshippers of the living God. Nevertheless it is clear that to the pious Israelite the hand of God was immediately present in Nature much as a man's is present in his own works,—that God's activity was likened to that of a man, and was thought of as directly subject to a will acting like a man's, and capable of varying its decisions to suit the immediate needs of God's dependent creatures. Indeed, it can hardly be said that the Bible thinks of Nature in our sense at all,—as a mechanism of material existence set over against God and organized by laws. This place is taken by the conception—far simpler and more closely analogous to human relations—of Creation, the handiwork of God, which he has fashioned, and which his instant purpose and will controls.

Similarly with the forces of evil. Behind the calamities of life, especially sicknesses, were believed to stand wicked personalities, temporarily permitted to exercise their malign activity, which deliberately inflicted harm on men, wholly after the analogy of a malicious human being but with a greater and mysterious power. To them were ascribed not only temptation to sin but especially sickness and misfortune,—derangement of the mind, the nerves, and the various organs of the body.

But it is necessary to observe that this conception of the immediate control of the world by free personal wills, arbitrarily acting with reference to the immediate object to be attained, intervening directly to promote the good or to effect the harm of the individual, was not the whole of the ancient view, whether among the Israelites or others. The regular courses of the sun and moon and stars had attracted attention; and the science of astronomy had already been founded in Babylonia and Egypt. The courses of the seasons, the permanent physical properties of matter, the tendency of iron to sink, of oil to rise to the surface of water, and thousands of other observations of the working of what we call natural laws were of course known to the simplest mind, and used for all the operations of daily work. Without such a practical use of the uniformity of nature civilization would be impossible, and these were highly civilized peoples. And the

characteristic fact about the stage of thought from which the New Testament comes to us was just this inconsistency. In the religious interpretation of the world, which constitutes the philosophy of a devout people, the immediate activity of personal wills explained everything. Yet in the ordinary affairs of daily life vast numbers of things were known to show a stability and regularity which did not naturally or strongly suggest the voluntary adaptation of means to immediate ends by a divine person. For such voluntary adaptation (as distinguished from the mechanical uniformity of impersonal forces) can reveal itself only by fluctuation of method under changing conditions. When a machine adapts itself automatically to the different sizes of the objects which are fed into it, then we say that it is almost human.

These ancient people, then, had a simple view of the direct relation of facts to underlying spiritual forces, good and bad, a view in which they were not shaken (although they were sometimes perplexed) by the obvious fact that the usual operation of Nature was uniform. The outcome of this combination of two ways of looking at the world of creation was a natural one, as we all recognize. The uniform is familiar, we take it as a matter of course, it seems to belong to us. Only the poet or the theologian feels God in and behind uniformity. But occasionally we are startled out of our complacency by the inexplicable, which runs counter to our usual observation and knowledge. Then, if we share the fundamental theistic belief of the Jews, we are likely to exclaim, God is in this place! The bushes of the desert are customary objects of our horizon, and seem to require no special explanation, even though we are aware that they clothe the slopes of the mountain of God. It is the bush that burns with fire and is not consumed which impels us to put our shoes from off our feet as on holy ground. The inexplicable is instinctively recognized as supernatural, and, if it commend itself as good, is pronounced divine. Certain South Sea islanders first clearly recognized the direct activity of God in the missionary because in a time of drought he dug them a well, and by novel and inexplicable power brought water from the rock.

Of all this there are abundant illustrations in the Bible. The

unaccountable mood in a man was regularly thought of as due to a spirit, whether of jealousy or anger, of insanity or meekness. The spirit was a demon, if the mood was evil; if the mood was good, it was the Holy Spirit of God. Unusual powers of any kind, if apparently good, were interpreted as due to direct endowment from God. The tendency of popular religion was to see divine activity not mainly and predominantly in the regular working of God's law, but in the irregular, the unusual, the startling, the thing which had no analogy, which was not explained by the well-known forces, and for the production of which, therefore, the hand of God must be assumed.

This condition of thought is made very clear by many facts that come to us from the Apostolic Age. All the unusual powers of the church, whether powers of government or of healing, of preaching or of the meaningless speech under the influence of religious excitement called speaking with tongues, were ascribed to God because they were unusual. The more unusual the gifts, the more the possessors of them prided themselves on their possession. The more inexplicable they were, the more divine and the more valuable they were accounted.

Since this general habit of mind thus saw a miracle in every inexplicable beneficence, no reported event, however strange, could seem to it highly and necessarily improbable. For all the exceptional there was a recognized place in the system, and one natural and acceptable explanation. Today, beyond question, the common view does not easily find place for a miracle, and tends to deny the trustworthiness of many accounts of unusual events. What has caused the change? We, too, believe in spiritual forces, at least in those of God's activity, underlying and superior to phenomena, and we call the supreme spiritual Force a person. We use for Him the analogy of human will and find satisfaction in it. Under prevalent conceptions of the immanent working of God we see him in all phenomena of matter and force, of physical and psychic life. If God be infinite personal will and infinite love, if nothing is removed from the sphere of his activity, how can we set limits to his action? He is everywhere directly and immediately present; why should he not set to his hand where he will, and on occasion act with reference to im-

mediate ends, as well as usually proceed with steady regard to general principles? That was substantially the ancient view; why does the world of today find difficulty with it?

The most important thing to notice in such an inquiry is the comparative simplicity of ancient popular experience. The idea of God is the highest concept in the human mind, and it is vital in proportion as it can take up into itself all the elements of human experience. The ancient man—in the circles from which the Bible comes to us—had a relatively simple experience. In government he was acquainted only with a simple organization; an absolute monarch with his arbitrary or even capricious will embodied for him the whole substance of government. Of the modern conception of society as a complicated and delicate organism in which forces, hidden and subtle but all-powerful, unite in intricate combination to produce a mechanism that may easily be put out of order and work badly or refuse to work at all,—of all that, with its clear significance for our thought of God, the popular world of the time of the Bible had hardly an inkling. The writers of the Bible had never seen a great machine such as a loom or a printing machine, with its infinite complexity of parts, its superhuman power, its perfect adjustment to the inconceivably varied duties before it,—and, we may add, its capacity for being put out of gear by any exception to the orderly working for which it was designed. Moreover, although there was much travel, and foreign nations were well-known, yet the actual field before the mind in thinking of the world was small, and only a few neighboring peoples touched the popular imagination of the inhabitants of any country. And although the vast distances of the stars were evident, and their number countless as the sands of the sea, yet any adequate notion of the complex unity of the system of the sidereal universe, which necessarily brings home to us the uniformity of natural laws and forces, was lacking.

There are doubtless many causes that have brought about the temper of modern thought. The religious motive which makes us like to find God in the natural and uniform—provided it is beneficent—has played its part; and the germ of the modern movement was here when the Apostle Paul, who shared the fundamental conceptions of antiquity, yet rose above them and

insisted that not the bare inexplicable, but the useful and edifying, reveals itself by its inner character as divine. The interests of modern science also, and the constant and repeated verification which it uses and on which it depends, have done their great work. Philosophical reflection and analysis have carried to their logical outcome the conceptions of uniformity upon which, as we have seen, civilization rests, and which, in their elements and embryo, were not absent from ancient popular thought. All these influences have contributed, but I cannot help thinking that the greatest influence of all on the mind of the masses of men has been the complexity of modern experience of the world.

For the result of our acquaintance with complicated machinery and our experience of complex systems of laws and forces in society and nature has been to give the ordinary man of today a vivid and new apprehension of the significance and value to mankind of the uniformity of natural law, and a keen sense that in a system of such extreme complexity as the universe exceptions to regular laws would be dangerous in a high degree. To the ordinary man of today it is not agreeable to think that nature is controlled by a will which is itself affected by the pathos or the wickedness of individual instances. Such a conception seems to him to contradict the notion of a trustworthy organization.

All this directly influences the idea of God, and of what God is likely to do or to have done; and hence in the normal, the regular, the uniform, we in our time see God more clearly than in the exceptional and inexplicable. Miracles once belonged to the natural conception of God's working; but now, entirely apart from any intruding idea of a separation of God from the universe in which he has worked hitherto and still works, we do not find them natural to our conception of God and his nature. The failure of the ancient world to find any such difficulty with miracles as we feel was a part of the historical conditions, and spiritual religion had to express itself in those conditions and no others, if it expressed itself at all. That Christianity comes to us in the gospels in the dress of the first century is evidence not against but for the antiquity and trustworthiness of those precious records. A primitive Christianity in which miracles were doubted would be itself an object of critical suspicion.

III

It is doubtless true that from the theistic point of view the possibility of miracles cannot be denied. But such an abstract possibility is empty. What troubles us is not what God might have done or permitted, but what certain narratives of the New Testament say that he did do,—statements which seem to us, at first sight at least, improbable.

Before proceeding farther it is worth while to inquire what the considerations are which would probably lead us to accept such narratives of miracles as true. Under what conditions would they seem no longer improbable but probable?

Would the belief that the testimony is that of a perfectly honest eye-witness convince you that the stilling of the storm was actually accomplished by Jesus' word, that through the power of Jesus bread for the five thousand actually came into existence when it had not previously been existent? I hardly think so, permanently. If you doubt these narratives, you doubt them on grounds which no evidence can touch. That an honest eye-witness told the story would cause you to believe that probably something happened which he so interpreted. If two honest eye-witnesses agreed, you would be even more convinced of this, and would perhaps have materials for making your own guess as to what the real and perceived phenomena were which the eye-witnesses thought they understood. You might be led to admit your own ignorance, or to suppose a hitherto unknown set of facts (as such have been brought to our knowledge by the discovery of the X-rays, and of new elements in the atmosphere); but that you should believe what the writers believed, and what they thought themselves to be describing, would not be brought about even by the coincident testimony of several persons who were present. It would always be possible to contrive a different theory than theirs and so to account for the admitted facts, or at least to say that they must have been mistaken.

No, the real difficulty is that miracles do not seem to be in accord with the analogies of life as we know it, and this difficulty

can only be overcome in one of two ways. It may, first, be shown that there are analogies, perhaps little known, which are within our knowledge and partial comprehension, and which enable us to see the naturalness of these events. Automatic writing on a planchette used to seem half-supernatural, or actually to be the work of Satan and witchcraft; when it was brought into relation with countless analogous phenomena of abnormal and normal psychology, it lost both its improbability as fact, and also the uncanny sense of contact with another world which had made it both attractive and repellent. Wholly similar is the case of the speaking with tongues at Corinth. There is no difficulty in understanding it, or in accepting Paul's statements as perfectly trustworthy, now that we have abundant illustrations of like results of religious excitement, at many dates and in many parts of the world. To Paul it was a miracle; we find in it an unusual, but not an isolated nor an unclassified, natural phenomenon. The observation or discovery of analogies which link a miracle in with our regular experience at once relieves the improbability which had before oppressed us. But, of course, this at the same time transforms the nature of the event from the exhibition of the direct intervention of God to a normal but unusual example of the regular working of his almighty power.

Secondly, there is another kind of consideration which, if admissible, might—and to some minds actually does—relieve the improbability that attaches to the miraculous narratives of the gospels. It is the consideration of the fitness of such events to the special situation. The difficulty with miracles is that they do not seem to accord with the analogies of life as we know it. But in the given instance there might have been something in the conditions and circumstances which made life different from what we know. May it not be that we have failed to see the general difference of situation, and that this makes us blind to the substantial analogies which would enable us to find a place for these events in our whole system? The jewels of an Indian prince seem to us fabulous; yet we do not deny their existence, for the whole condition of his life is foreign to our experience. If there were four dimensions, the conditions of existence under them would be so altered that much of what now holds true in space would be

false. So with countless strange facts in history. If we could believe that an archangel had appeared to men, we should fully expect, and could easily believe, that he would show many powers which neither a man nor a great bird possesses. These attributes would be easily credible, because they would fit the situation. We should not ask for analogies from our own life, for in the nature of the case such analogies would not be at hand.

Many thoughtful modern Christians hold that here is to be found relief in the matter of the New Testament miracles. If, it is said, we believe in the Incarnation of the Son of God, that is the great miracle, and all minor miracles become fitting by virtue of that belief and lose the improbability which would otherwise attach to them. Faith in the Incarnation, it is said, carries with it such a view of the person of Jesus Christ that his miracles are no longer improbable, but are natural, appropriate, and easy to understand and believe.

Whether this consideration will give aid or not will depend on the conception of the meaning of the Incarnation which is held. Under some conceptions this contention will hold, under others it will not. The thorough-going conception of a docetic Christ, the apparition of a spiritual being made visible but devoid of real contact with the world, as some Christians and some half-Christians of the earliest centuries frankly believed, will obviously make it easy to think that miracles of many sorts accompanied his appearance on earth. And a less extreme view, which yet makes its starting-point the idea of an intrusion from outside into human life, and sets divine and human over against each other in sharp contrast, conceiving of Christ as a man, indeed, but as in some sense an alien in human guise, will likewise permit with comparative readiness the belief in other coincident and subsidiary miracles. On the other hand a sincere belief in the Incarnation may start from the conception of God and man as one, and from the fact that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, made in all things like unto his brethren that he might succor them that are tempted and make propitiation for the sins of the people, one whom we have heard, we have seen with our eyes, we beheld, and our hands handled. To such a view the Incarnation is faith's interpretation of fact, not a fact which can be known or accepted with-

out religious faith; the dramatic story of its process is likely to seem the symbol or outward form of the reality, not its essence. This conception of the Incarnation is as genuine and reverent and profound as any other; but to it miracles are not specially congenial, nor, under such a view, does the belief that in Jesus Christ is to be seen the divine man who in his person brings to us God himself, relieve the difficulty of the miraculous narratives of the gospels,—where, after all, miracles are on the whole occasional and exceptional, not the ordinary and universal attendants and conditions of Jesus' mode of existence.

But this is not the place to discuss and answer these questions. No answer is possible apart from the general fundamental convictions of each individual, upon which his view in this matter will rest. What is here desired is to point out that, if a strictly miraculous character is ascribed to certain events reported in the gospel history, belief that those events actually took place does not, and cannot, rest on mere evidence, but necessarily depends on a general system of thought and in particular on our special view of the nature of the Incarnation.

IV

Without here attempting to examine in detail the narratives of New Testament miracles, or to introduce a comparison of the narratives of similar events, ancient and modern, outside the New Testament which throw light—and they do throw much light²—on certain classes of the New Testament miracles, we may approach the miracles of the New Testament by dividing them into three classes:

(1) First come those events reported as miracles which rest on good testimony (such testimony as for other than miraculous narratives would be deemed adequate), and which, by the analogy of our own knowledge, or the reports of credible witnesses, we are able to link in with other well-attested experience.

² Illuminating facts are to be found, for instance, in Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, and in P. Janet, *The Major Symptoms of Hysteria*.

It has already been said that such an attitude toward these miracles will remove them from the class of miracles proper and lead us to treat them as unusual or startling, but yet explicable and natural, occurrences. We may take as examples of this class of miracles some of the narratives of the Book of Acts, as for instance the raising by Paul from apparent death of Eutychus who fell out of the window, or the events at Malta where Paul was protected against the viper's bite, and the father of Publius cured of fever and dysentery. These are all told with the evident belief on the writer's part that they were miracles. Yet in the two latter instances the writer seems himself to have been present. Stories of this group are numerous, and should cause no difficulty. They relate to real and entirely credible events. All that is miraculous is the writer's interpretation of the phenomena, and this we are at liberty to accept or reject.

So, again, the cases of the cure of demoniacs, whether in gospels or Acts, find their full analogy in the many instances of the wholly similar exorcism of demons attested in early centuries by church fathers as well as by heathen like Celsus, and known also in modern times. Wherever—as in China today—demons are believed to take possession of men, there will be cases known of marvellous cures wrought not by medical skill but in one instance by the power of a great personality, in another by some radical change in the circumstances or inner state of the possessed. These were cases of mental and nervous derangement, and the cures were wrought by similar means to those to which these strange and subtle disorders have often yielded within the experience of careful modern observers.

Not unlike these are many of the other cases reported in the New Testament of sickness not specially called demoniacal. Well-attested instances in modern times present satisfactory parallels. At no time in the history of the world from that day to this has the stream of such cases failed. For we must recognize that the number of illnesses due in part or wholly to mental and nervous causes, and so in greater or less degree susceptible to mental and nervous influences, is enormous. The paralysis of hysteria is as actual as that of apoplexy, but it may be made to disappear by a variety of influences. Blindness, deafness, dumb-

ness, lameness, the withered hand, catalepsy, are all naturally ascribed to this cause. These hysterical affections are still common among the lower classes of our population. They are rarely seen in most physicians' private practice, but are frequent in the cases applying for relief at the hospitals of great cities. So many of the cures reported or referred to in the New Testament can be accounted for in this way that it is easy to believe that, if we could learn accurately all the circumstances of most of the others, we should find them to contradict nothing that we know in well-attested experience. The marvels of mediaeval Tours and modern Lourdes and hundreds of other places, and of Christian Science, are real; and they can be matched from abundant sober records of critical physicians.

Of course it is to be remembered that these narratives have come to us through reporters who believed these events to be due to the exercise of supernatural and divine power, and not to be in accordance with natural analogies. The stories are told in that spirit, and it may well be that under that conception details have crept in which are not true and which in reality could only be explained by assuming a miracle. It must be borne in mind that we have no scientific diagnosis of these cases, but only the general impression, perhaps of ignorant by-standers, perhaps of the evangelist himself; and that no careful investigation was, or could be, made. In many cases we are not in a position to know exactly what the disease was, still less to judge whether it could have been helped by the means employed. And there is always a good chance of some degree of mere exaggeration.

Ready analogies also enable us in a measure to understand visions (like those to Paul on his voyage to Rome), and manifestations of the Spirit in the bestowal of graces of prophecy, of powerful speech, of the gift of tongues. These things fall in perfectly with the world as we know it. They belong to somewhat unusual, but by no means to unreal, fields of human experience.

Into this class of miracles,—events which really happened and were honestly reported, which were believed by those who narrated them to be miracles, but which have for us sufficient analogy in experience to make them wholly credible, will fall the vast and overwhelming majority—nearly the whole—of the miracles

of the New Testament. The New Testament is full of miracles, but they are not mere legendary wonders, they are mainly such honest accounts of entirely real events as were naturally given by a generation which fully believed in miracles.

(2) A second class consists of certain miracles narrated by the same writers who have given us the accounts of the first class, just discussed, but in the case of which no satisfactory analogy from experience seems to exist, or to be possible. Such are the walking on the water, the feeding of the five thousand, the appearance of the dead from their graves at the crucifixion, the miraculous release of Peter from prison, the cursing of the fig-tree, and some others.

These events are doubted, not because of any defect in their attestation, but solely because they are miracles. With regard to them no single statement can be made. It is easy to suggest that as analogies from experience have been found for many strange events recorded in history, so others may be discovered for these, and the abstract possibility of this is not easy to deny. It is also possible in some cases to imagine how under the influence of a theological conception the story of a real event may have been completely transformed in the telling. And, doubtless, we must also be prepared to admit the possibility of some legends, even in the generally trustworthy narratives of our gospels. The point to be urged is that the number of these narratives is small, that they must be studied individually, and, in view of all that we have seen, that they do not discredit the record.

(3) A third class of miracles, also small, but important, presents different problems. They are those cases where the question about the evidence itself is complex, and the difficulty of the problem does not lie solely in the miraculous element of the narratives. Such are the miracles found in the Gospel of John, notably the wine at Cana and the raising of Lazarus. It cannot be said that the historical testimony here is as strong as it is for incidents recorded by Mark; and the whole character of the Fourth Gospel is an essential element in forming a judgment about these miracles. Only as we understand that profound writer's purpose and method can we tell what those narratives carry of underlying historical fact.

Here will also fall the two great miracles of the virgin birth of Jesus and his resurrection. Into the discussion of these we cannot enter. But it is important to notice that in both cases the evidence is complicated and not simple, and that the difficulties do not reside wholly in the miraculous elements of the story, and, further, that both of these relate to events partly outside the limits of this world of space and time.

The sum of the matter is familiar, and has been often stated. The theistic position in itself does not require, or even necessarily permit to the modern thinker, a belief in miracles. Such a belief must be a part of a special system of theological views, and only in that case can it be held with freedom and peace of mind. To ancient theistic thought it was entirely congenial, and when Christianity, the religion of the spirit, expressed itself in the historical conditions of the first century, those who remembered and recorded its history naturally and properly saw in many events the miraculous working of divine power. That they did so casts no discredit on the general trustworthiness of their work, where that is attested by other internal and external evidence. Their willingness to report miracles is no sign of credulity, but is only one phase of the whole intellectual system through the medium of which they viewed the facts. Miracles were at first arguments. They are so no longer, but therein they have only shared the fate of all arguments, for an effective argument is in the nature of the case related to current modes of thought and hence likely to prove of temporary validity. The gospel narratives of miracles are one of the historical modes through which spiritual Christianity reveals itself to us. They are to be treated like all the historical expressions of our religion, that is to say, understood historically, and approached as forms which can teach us much about underlying substance.

As expressions of truth, miraculous narratives are not to be taken as allegories, but from them we can yet learn the specific thought about God and Jesus Christ which, in its own historically conditioned way, primitive Christianity thus expressed. As to their value as statements of historical fact, we can often use them with confidence. Often, however, we must be content to leave

pressing questions undecided. We cannot know in every case what the facts were, nor how far the story rests on actual recollection, nor how or why it arose. This is true in all ancient history, and we have no right to ask for more certainty in the New Testament than elsewhere. Such willingness to admit that uncertain things are uncertain is essential if the modern world is to be convinced that the early history of Christianity is substantially true.